

Nebrask@ Online
Investing in the Nebraska E-Government Strategic Plan
Proposals to Accelerate Progress Toward a Preferred Future

In 2000, the State Government Council of the Nebraska Information Technology Commission developed a strategic for implementing e-government. Both the NITC and the Governor endorsed the plan. Since then, considerable progress has been made toward some elements of the plan. However, opportunities exist to make strategic investments directed toward accelerating progress in a comprehensive, enterprise-wide fashion. This document provides a status report on key elements of the strategic plan; identifies areas where strategic investments will accelerate progress; and proposes investment of Nebraska State Records Board grant funds toward that goal.

Vision and Goals (E-Government Strategic Plan)

VISION: The State of Nebraska will be open for business from any place and at any time through the use of e-government.

GOAL: Anyone needing to do business with state government will be able to go to the state's web site, easily find the information or service they need, and if they desire, complete all appropriate transactions electronically.

GOAL: State agencies will improve services and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations through collaboration, communication, and data sharing between government agencies at all levels.

GOAL: Agencies will examine internal operations to determine cost-effective e-government applications and solutions. The purpose of these efforts is to improve efficiency and effectiveness by replacing manual operations with automated techniques.

GOAL: Agencies will work with other state agencies and local governments to develop strategies for using Internet technologies to provide integrated access to information and services to citizens, businesses, employees, and other governmental entities.

DEFINITION: E-government is the use of technology to enhance information sharing, service delivery, constituency and client participation, and governance by transforming internal and external relationships.

State E-Government Strategic Plan – Status Report

The state's E-Government Strategic Plan clearly articulates a preferred future:

- Anyone needing to do business with state government will be able to go to the state's website, easily find the information or service they need, and if they desire, complete all appropriate transactions electronically.

Status: *The state's web portal currently provides 7x24x365 worldwide access to virtually all information or services available online from state and local government agencies. The current approach provides multiple ways to access information and services, such as new & featured sites, categories, online searches*

as well as by agency. It represents an initial step in the direction of integrating information and services across agencies and levels of government.

The integration concept has been extended to a subset of the user base through Nebrask@ Online for Business, the Governor's business portal initiative. Consideration should be given to applying the same concept to other subsets such as citizen services, employee services, and education. The integration or portal concept also has application in the area of online payments.

A considerable amount of information is now available online, but work remains in bringing forms, processes, and payment transactions online in an integrated, enterprise-wide manner. These are the key areas that require attention in order to provide the opportunity to conduct all appropriate transactions electronically.

The plan goes on to describe several steps that are necessary to achieve this preferred future, including:

- All agencies will have a website (designed to address accessibility issues), which at a minimum will provide the public with information about the agency and include an e-mail address and phone number to get additional information.

Status: Only seven state agencies remain that do not currently have a website. All are very small agencies with limited staff. Nebrask@ Online has approached all of these agencies and is presently working with five to bring websites online. Two have indicated no interest in having a website. NOL conducts regular accessibility testing on sites they host, and agencies that host their own or use third-party vendors are expected to maintain compliance with accessibility standards.

- Allow easier and greater involvement of the public in government processes, such as having all agencies utilize the state's public meeting calendar and providing online access to all government rules & regulations.
- *Status: The online public meeting calendar has been available for use by state agencies since late 1999, and nearly 50 agencies or divisions have designated staff that is authorized to update the calendar. Several agencies have posted their rules & regulations to the Internet, but there is presently no search capability available either within or across agencies. Participants in last year's business portal focus groups mentioned this capability, along with the ability to track progress and comment on draft rules & regulations, as highly desirable.*
- Provide all agency forms for download and print (at a minimum) with the ability to complete and transmit the form electronically preferred.
- *Status: Approximately one-third of the forms contained in the business portal forms inventory are available online in some format. The remaining two-thirds*

(about 850 forms) are not. The online availability of other, non-business forms remains to be assessed. The Business Portal – Phase II grant approved by the State Records Board will provide resources to automate the vast majority of forms in the business portal inventory.

- Aggressively move toward making the transactions associated with all forms and reports filed with state government, including license applications and renewals, available for completion electronically.

Status: Progress toward complete automation (or as complete as agency business processes allow) has been made, but has been generally slow and agency- or process-specific. Agencies such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, Secretary of State, and Game & Parks have brought many of their services online. Others have made a considerable amount of information available online, but are still in the early stages of complete transaction automation.

License renewals, filings, permits & registrations have been made available online by seven agencies. Several others are interested in this type of application, including Health & Human Services (with 42 professional licenses). However, cost (whether one-time or ongoing) is a consideration for most of these agencies. It is also desirable to pursue an enterprise-wide approach that will allow for a rapid and consistent approach to bringing these services online.

- Develop and implement strategies for using electronic transactions for purchasing, procurement, and payment activities.

Status: Electronic transactions for state purchasing and procurement are being considered as part of the NIS project. Payment from citizens and businesses that use online services is made either through Nebraska@ Online's subscriber-based services or for individual services via credit card. Some online applications (such as unemployment insurance and taxes) have traditional check payment systems or ACH payments that are separate from the online process.

In cases where payment is made online via credit card, a payment-processing module must be added to each application. This means that a user wishing to complete multiple transactions must go through the entire process, including entering credit card information, for each transaction. It seems desirable to work toward aggregating multiple payments into a single payment transaction to improve ease of use and integration across agencies.

Another payment option that is generating considerable interest is electronic checks. These work almost identically to online credit card payments, but the user inputs account and routing numbers instead of credit card numbers. Back-end processing is somewhat different between the two payment types. Typically, electronic check systems are based on a flat fee per transaction as opposed to the percentage of payment amount used by credit cards.

An additional feature that would be useful is automating general ledger documents and eventual integration with the NIS system as it comes online. Presently, agencies must process a paper general ledger document with the State Treasurer to complete movement of money into the proper account. An intermediate step is to automate the ledger document for online completion and transmission to the State Treasurer. When the NIS system is activated, it should be possible to integrate this information to fully automate the process.

Overall, there are a number of opportunities to integrate and advance electronic payments in conjunction with online government services.

Strategic Investments to Accelerate Progress

The State's E-Government Strategic Plan provides the framework for future work. Existing resources will cover on-going activities such as maintenance of the official state portal, website assistance for remaining agencies that do not have websites, support and marketing of the business portal.

Targeted use of grant resources will accelerate progress on the e-government strategic plan in the following areas:

- Government to Business.

***FUTURE PLANS:** The Phase II Business Portal Grant will permit continued progress on forms automation and developing interactive licensing functions. Close coordination with the Nebraska Information System will permit the addition of electronic transactions for state procurement processes to the Business Portal.*

In cooperation with the Secretary of State and state agencies, Nebrask@ Online will develop a robust search capability for agency rules and regulations, ensure that all rules and regulations are available in a web-searchable format, set standards for online posting of rules and regulations going forward, and eventually create a tracking and comment system for draft rules and regulations.

Nebrask@ Online will cooperate with the CIO and State Government Council to identify an enterprise-wide approach for rapid deployment of online license renewal, filing, permitting & registration. Grant funds from the NSRB and Government Technology Collaboration Fund would accelerate progress by providing resources to reduce long-term costs for agencies (lower transaction or maintenance fees).

Focus groups with business associations will identify other priority enhancements to the Business Portal.

- Government to Citizen.

FUTURE PLANS: In his speech to the E-Government Conference last fall, Governor Johanns challenged agencies to contribute to Nebraska's "Digital Democracy" by adding to the information and services that citizens can obtain over the Internet. He advocated using the Internet as a tool to give citizens more direct involvement in their government. One example is developing the means that would allow citizens to subscribe to a service that automatically notifies them of official actions in selected areas of interest.

Nebrask@ Online will cooperate with the CIO and State Government Council in planning and setting priorities for a "citizens' portal".

Some of the initiatives underway for the Business Portal must be expanded to include general citizen needs. Forms automation, interactive licensing functions, and ability to search rules and regulations are examples. Creating a system for online progress tracking and commenting on draft rules & regulations would also promote digital democracy, regardless of whether the user is an individual or business.

Nebrask@ Online is ready to work with the NITC Education Council and others to develop an Education Portal that would provide easier access to educational resources.

- Government to Employee (Internal Operations)

FUTURE PLANS: It is imperative that agencies continue their efforts to use information technology in order to gain operating efficiencies. One aspect of this is giving employees easier access to information they require and automating routine functions.

The CIO and State Government Council will take the lead in planning an employee portal. Although Nebrask@ Online will not have a major role in government to employee applications, it is important to plan these systems so that there is good coordination with the State's portal. Information Management Services Division would likely provide most of the technical support for an employee portal.

- E-Government Infrastructure

Nebrask@ Online will leverage work underway at the NIC corporate level on a comprehensive payment portal. Support will be necessary to customize the portal for Nebraska's needs.

Nebrask@ Online will continue its efforts to integrate information and services across agencies and levels of government. Implementing a common look and feel, reusing code where possible, and pursuing enterprise solutions to widespread functions are essential to portal development for additional user segments, including citizen services, education, state employees.

Funding

A combination of existing resources, grants from the Nebraska State Records Board and the Government Technology Collaboration Fund managed by the State Government Council of the NITC can support rapid, significant progress in key areas.

Attached are five grant proposals to the NSRB that address these various initiatives. The State Government Council is considering additional grant resources directed toward aspects of these initiatives as well. In combination, these proposals represent a sound investment to accelerate progress on the state's e-government strategic plan.